



*It is unfortunate that the word 'consumerism' has been co-opted by the left as a term of abuse.*

Optimism is a feature rarely seen in contemporary public debate. Rather, the media is full of dreary gloom—whether in the areas of biotechnology, nuclear power, over-population, consumerism, the cultural effects of globalisation, or—the big one—climate change, skilled political commentators can have rewarding careers without ever saying anything positive about the state of the world.

Right-of-centre, we are not immune to this cynical pessimism either. Focusing on public policy and politics can often be as depressing to the right as an endangered species list is to the left. Government spending continues to grow, regulation continues to increase, and hardly a day goes by without a piece of legislation or policy announcement that limits liberal freedoms. With the Rudd government now eyeballing the dubious achievements of Tony Blair, it might be hard to avoid having the occasional cry into our collective beers.

And so it can hardly be emphasised enough that, on almost every possible measure, the world is getting better.

In this edition of the *IPA Review*, Louise Staley walks us through the substantial empirical evidence for that proposition. Infant mortality rates are declining rapidly. Nutrition is improving rapidly. Access to clean water and literacy rates; life expectancy and living standards—across the board, these measures are strongly trending upwards. And developing nations are increasingly sharing the bounty.

As a consequence, when so much of the left's critical energy is being directed towards the climate change issue, it is absolutely essential that liberals and conservatives aggressively remind people that their standard of living has never

been higher. It is a tired old cliché, but 'if history is any guide' there is every reason to suspect that this state of affairs will continue. The world will keep improving despite the pessimism of our newspaper columnists.

But improvements to our well-being aren't limited to dry statistics. Globalisation has given us access to more high-quality culture than we could possibly consume in a lifetime. Socially, it is more possible to live the lifestyle that we choose than at any other time in history.

And it is unfortunate that the word 'consumerism' has been co-opted by the left as a term of abuse—there are more niche products available to us than ever before. If you love Romanian hip-hop, or bocconcini, or reproduction Georgian furniture, obtaining them is easy and inexpensive. Somehow, the left manage to caricature this explosion of tastes and choices as a failure of the capitalist system—but it is, on the level of the individual, one of capitalism's greatest strengths.

There are, of course, many areas of the world desperate to share in this bounty, and many areas of Australian society—indigenous communities for one—which are currently missing out. But their challenge is to follow the trail set by the West. And, as Louise Staley confirms, there is good reason for hope.

Optimism is, after all, one of liberalism's key themes.

Elsewhere in this issue, we focus on the need to increase Australia's immigration levels. John Humphreys argues that the case for free immigration agreements is just as strong as the case for free trade agreements—perhaps even better. Ken Phillips writes about the importance of immigration to resolving the skills shortage, and why the government just doesn't get it. And Richard Allsop notes that,

contrary to popular opinion, the political party that gives the biggest support to expanding immigration may not be the party we immediately think of.

Stefan Theil reveals the perilous state of European education in economics. If Europe is to kick itself out of its sluggish growth, it might want to start with revising its school textbooks.

And all eyes in the Liberal Party will be on the Republican Party and the British Tories. Tim Wilson peers behind the Republican primaries to discover the awkward ideological maneuvering in the GOP. And James Campbell picks up the UK Conservative Party at the high point of its decade in opposition, and shows us just how it got there.

But if there is anything to tie these diverse articles together, it is their optimistic tone. When given political and economic freedom, individuals shape their world for the better. **R**



*Good times*

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*Anything that blames John Howard or George Bush for the ills of the world gets a wide and willing audience.*

Following substantial growth in sales and an overwhelming response from readers the *IPA Review* will now be published more often. Beginning with this edition the *IPA Review* will appear every two months instead of quarterly. Furthermore, the structure of the magazine has been changed to give cover a broader range of commentary and policy ideas.

It's coincidental that this decision was taken a few months before the demise of *The Bulletin* was announced. In the wake of the end of *The Bulletin* it wasn't difficult to find any number of analysts, publishers, and pundits predicting the doom of printed current affairs and political journals. Allegedly the internet was to blame. The story went that fewer and fewer people were interested in reading hardcopy journals and magazines. What was wanted instead was something that was instantaneous and able to be downloaded on to an iPhone.

Well—this hasn't been the case with the *IPA Review*. Sales of the *IPA Review* from newsstands around the country have doubled in the last twelve months. Articles and stories from the *IPA Review* have been reprinted in the major news outlets nationally and internationally. And the number of unsolicited contributions has dramatically increased. Clearly the *IPA Review* is having an impact and people want to read it.

The achievements of the *IPA Review* have proven wrong one of the supposed truisms of Australian intellectual life. Namely that left-wingers buy left-wing books but liberals don't buy liberal books. While the *IPA Review* isn't a book of course, the principle still applies. At this stage the circulation of the *IPA Review* doesn't challenge that of magazines of a broadly left-wing persuasion—but it is our aim to change this state of affairs in a very short period of time.

It might simply be that the reason liberals don't buy books is that there are so few books for them to buy. It could be a case of 'market failure'. Few books of commentary, history, or politics are

written because there is no perceived market for such books. By contrast anything that blames John Howard or George Bush for all the ills of the world gets a wide and willing audience.

One of the reasons for the success of the *IPA Review* is that when people buy it they know what to expect. They know that the Institute of Public Affairs and the *IPA Review* will argue for greater personal choice and less government, less tax, and less regulation. Unfortunately that is a perspective all too rarely found in the media in Australia. It is a position the IPA has held to consistently since the Institute's founding in 1943.

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